THE RICHARD JOHNSONS view themselves on national television Wednesday night during Public Broadcasting Service documentary entitled "The Man in the Middle". The family said they felt "somewhat of a negative approach was taken" but Johnson said there are some real problems that the middle-class American must face. There is something special about being on national television and now the family can testify to that.

TV Family: 'We're Not All That Poor'

by DOUG RAY

The Washington reporter wanted ordinary people and that's just what he found at the Richard Johnsons.

The Johnsons are a Rolling Meadows family, like many others in the middle-class community, who strive to pay monthly bills, worry about where the money will come from, but after each month manage to keep their heads above the water.

The family was the subject of a Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) documentary in Channel 11 Wednesday night entitled "the Man in the Middle." Reporter Robert MacNeil, who spent a week with the family at 2402 Willow St., presented the plight of middle class suburbia, too wealthy for federal aid but not rich enough to have much left over after all accounts are cleared.

Watching the broadcast with the Johnsons, however, showed that the family is not as destitute as the program depicted. "They were showing the hardships of life," Johnson said during the program. "We're not as poor as it seems," he said.

MacNEIL TOLD THE viewing audience, which may have been as many as 3 million persons, that the Johnsons pay all their bills and can't manage to save anything — thus "the Man in the Middle." What was spliced out of the program was Johnson's statements about the stock program through his job. "Sure we do without, but not as much as they made it seem," Johnson said.

It was also stated in the program that a school lunch for the Johnson girls, who attend a Lutheran school in Arlington Heights, costs 45 cents and that is too bring peanut butter and jelly instead.

But the girls said during the broadcast that they dislike the school's hot lunches and prefer the sack-lunch variety.

"They left a lot out," said Mrs. Johnson and her husband agreed. "The positive things they didn't put in," he said.

Johnson said he felt many of his neighbors could identify with the program aimed at presenting middle class problems. "We're not out to make a killing," he said, "just to survive."

BEING ON NATIONAL television was a big treat for the entire group. The girls giggled when they saw themselves. Richard and Mary Ann Johnson beamed with smiles.

It took the production crew about 30 to 40 hours to film the program, Johnson said. Segments were cut to end up with a half-hour broadcast, which showed the middle class American in a tough spot.

"We really are in a squeeze," Johnson said. "But a lot of us are in the same boat."